

The Isaac Corwin House  
Borough of Chester  
Morris County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-628

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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N.J.

14. CHEST.

The Isaac Corwin House  
Borough of Chester  
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Owner: (and occupant) Miss Eliza L. Topping (since decd.)

Date of Erection: About 1800

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Isaac Corwin (1759-1830)

Present Condition: Original, fairly well maintained

Number of Stories: Two and one-half, with garret and cellar

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone masonry

Exterior walls - timber frame, clapboarded

Interior walls - lath and plaster on studding

Chimneys - brick, two built into inside of east gable end wall, and one free standing

Roof - gambrel, wood shingled. Tin roofing over same on lower slope

Historical Data:

The identification of this house, its original and succeeding owners, is the result of search in documentary evidences contemporary with the subject and is reported as follows:

Isaac Corwin, born 7 April 1759, son of John Corwin of Mattituck, Long Island, and his first wife Sarah Hubbard, died 1st November 1830 in Chester Township, Morris County, having married Experience Reeves (born 13 April 1759, died 15 August 1839) and emigrated "during or at the end of the Revolution and settled near Chester and Flanders, Morris County, on the Black River". He had fourteen children.(a) The ownership of

(a) Edward T. Corwin, The Corwin Genealogy in the United States, publ. 1872, pp. 98 and 120.

the land on which stands the house here considered has been traced to this Isaac Corwin, and its design and details indicating its late 18th century erection, contemporary with his arrival in Chester, the deduction is made that the house was then built for him. It is still known locally as "the old Corwin place".

By deed of 13 January 1829, Isaac Corwin and wife Experience, abovenamed, of Chester conveyed to James Topping of same place, for \$1400, the 53 acre tract there extending northwest from a frontage on "the Washington Turnpike Road" and "the Road which leads to New Brunswick", being respectively the modern State Highways numbers 24 and 31 in the Borough of Chester.

James Topping the grantee of 1829 as above, was born 1st June 1780, sixth of the seven children of William Topping (1743-7 June 1822) and his wife Sarah Sandford Topping (1749-28 Feb. 1837) who had come from East Hampton, Long Island, to Morris County before that date and occupied the farm later owned by John Carlyle, known in 1895 as the W. J. Taylor place. At 15 years James Topping was apprenticed to Jonathan Scudder of Westfield (Union County) cabinet maker, and at 22 married there Sarah Marsh\*. After serving his time, he and another young man bought out Scudder, and continued the business there for a year, when he sold his interest back to Scudder, removed to Chester, in Morris County, bought the place known in 1895 as that of George Hedden and resided in the house (still standing in the latter year), nearly opposite the shop in which he continued business many years. At 30 he purchased the homestead from his father, and about 50 years later "bought the property on which he lived until the time of his death, and moved upon the farm he bought of Reeves (sic) Corwin. This house was built about 1800. About the time he bought the Corwin place he became a member of the Presbyterian

\* Cf. Marriage records publ. 1929 in Conn. Hist. of Presb. Ch. in Westfield 1728-1928, p. 448 viz.  
"James Tappin and Sally Mash 10 April 1801". (sic)

Church of which he was always a generous supporter." (c)

The gravestone inscriptions in the Presbyterian Churchyard in Chester include among twelve in this surname, those of James Topping, who died 16 September 1874 aged 94 years, 3 mos. and 16 days and of Sarah wife of James Topping who died 17 October 1854 in her 74th year, who were the above-said second owners and occupants of the house here surveyed. Their children were: 1. Eliza who died 8 Oct. 1868 aged 67-7-0 unmarried, 2. Charles drowned by accident aged 4 years, 3. Mary Ann born 7 July 1809, died 11 May 1890, wife of Henry Hedges, 4. Evert, a professor at Princeton College and in Baltimore, 5. Jane died aged 27, wife of John S. Hunt, 6. Theodore who died 6 December 1873, 7. George died aged 27 unmarried, and 8. Sarah Augusta born 27 February 1826, died 28 February 1918 unmarried. (c)

In his will of 25 March 1874, James Topping abovesaid of Chester devised inter al., to Eliza L. Topping daughter of his deceased son Theodore, the part of his (testator's) "homestead farm lying on the north side of the Public Road", and to his daughter-in-law Nellie E. Topping one-half the "rents, issues, and profits" thereof; to his daughters Mary Ann Hedges and Sarah A. Topping and grandchildren Arabella H. Pierson and Richard E. Hunt the remainder of his homestead farm equally among them; also to the last three named two-thirds of the minerals on said farm, they to pay \$1500 to the Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of Chester in 1878 if that sum accrued then, and to his daughter-in-law Nellie E. Topping and his granddaughter Eliza L. Topping the remaining third of the minerals, with bequests to other heirs named. Testator mentioned a new "house lately erected on said homestead farm" for his said daughter-in-law, and appointed Lyman H. Pierson as executor.

(c) Rev. Theo. F. Chambers, *Early Germans of New Jersey*, publ. 1895, pp. 532-533. The name Reeves Corwin in the quotation above is an error for Isaac Corwin as see deed of 1829 cited supra.

Nellie E. Topping abovenamed was widow of testator's son Theodore Topping who died 6 December 1873. Evidently she married secondly Lyman H. Pierson, also named above, for, as Nellie E. Pierson of Chester Township, she devised by her will of 11 November 1905 to her son Ernest Lyman Pierson (if living at time of her death and otherwise to her daughter Eliza Lyon Topping) all the estate bequeathed by her late husband Lyman H. Pierson. She died 6 June 1919.

By deed of 19 June 1931, Ernest Pierson the devisee abovesaid, with wife Florence conveyed to said Eliza Lyon Topping his inherited interest in the "Homestead Farm of which James Topping died seized in the year 1874", describing it as situated on "both sides of the Turnpike Road leading from Chester Village to Coopers Mills, containing about 30 acres", and by this and similar conveyances from other heirs, the said granddaughter Eliza Lyon Topping came into possession of their half interest therein, she being the devisee of the other half. The last named was the owner and occupant of the house (here considered) at the time of our survey in 1939, and died later in the same year. She informed us that the smaller of the two rooms in the rear wing was used by her grandfather James Topping as his workshop.

A recognized type of mansion house design standardized in the last decade of the 18th century, as is evident in height of stories increased over that of preceeding work, in lighter scale of wood moldings, window muntins and door panels, etc., this particular example departs from the norm in having a pair of chimneys in but one gable end, the omission of same in the other end being somewhat supplied by a single chimney built free standing some feet inside that gable end. The part brick and part stone rear wing is remarkable also, and with the chimney last

mentioned may remain from an earlier house here partly demolished and incorporated into the present house.

Bibliography:

A search of title in Land and Probate records of Morris County by Cornelius W. McPhillips, H.A.B.S. abstractor

Field book and drawings of the Survey

*Leur's D. Cook*

Supervising Historian

Approved:

*Seymour Williams*

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.  
District Officer

DW 10/2/40